

A MODERN PETRUCHIO.

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PART I.—THE WAGER.

CHAPTER I.



It was very still in Mr. Myrick's library; the sun shone in long rays across the room, upon the rows of books, reflecting light from the polished furniture. Even Mr. Myrick's dry old law-books caught a portion of the sunny smile on their dusty backs, and not a little of the merry beam shone on the bright curling brown hair of Laurence Owen,

as he bent over his desk. But he did not raise his head or move his papers, the glare from which must have dazzled him. His pen scratched on, as if his task were deep and serious in its nature.

Probably much of his conduct may be explained when it is added that, well out of the sunlight, perched on the highest step of the library-ladder, sat Miss Ruth Myrick, watching him with furtive glances, while she made a great pretense of looking over a book. Her glance betrayed so much mischief, that it was not hard to decide that a sharp battle had preceded this ominous silence.

Ruth Myrick—or "Rue," as she was usually dubbed—knew she had no right in her father's sanctum, tormenting this young law-student, and still less had she authority to be poring over Dumas, George Sand, and Balzac in that forbidden corner.

Mr. Myrick's office was in his private residence; but he certainly never intended that, with all of the elegant mansion at her command, his pretty daughter should thus invade his domain. But there is an old adage: "When the cat is away, the mice will play"; and Rue Myrick, her black eyes dancing and every feature brimming over with mirth, was a truthful illustration of the maxim. She was evidently enjoying the situation, and had utterly routed the enemy—Laurence Owen, the young law-student

—in the late encounter. She had a method in the maddest flights of frivolity, and, to-day, the solving of her problem was no more to be found in Balzac or Dumas than in the French dictionary. She had ere this translated Mr. Laurence Owen into plain English, and she felt she could rule him with a thread of silk. She came, to-day, to turn her influence to account.

To be sure, the hot discussion on the propriety of her reading George Sand seemed a doubtful preface to her hopes; but she was a stanch little soldier. She knew the value of an unconditional surrender later. Suddenly, she dropped the volume she held; she gave a little exclamation, then said:

"Mr. Owen, won't you pick up my book?"

No reply but the pen's busy scratch on the paper.

"Mr. Owen—please! I cannot get down and come up the ladder again."

"I do not wish to be disobliging, Miss Myrick, but I certainly shall not pick it up, except to restore it to the shelf." He spoke quickly, as he raised firm gray eyes to meet her glance.

"Oh, dear—why should I not read French novels? Have you read them all, that you know so much about them?" in an artfully pensive tone and pouting childishly, as she gazed down at the book.

"I have read enough, and know that of which I speak."

"Did you read in French?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, then," delightedly, "you must have got the very worst of them. I'll tell you something, if you will promise not to scold me. You are so cross to-day."

"I am exceedingly busy, and have little time to trifle."

"Then I will not tell you, if I have to sit here all night." And Miss Myrick stamped her small foot on the step of the ladder in sudden wrath.

"I am not too busy to help you out of temptation if you wish to descend," he said, smiling; and the radiance completely changed his fair young face.

"Thank you, Mr. Owen. You read French, then?"

"Yes."

"I do not know one word of French," she drawled, slowly.

He flushed up to his forehead.

"These books are all in French," she continued, with a mocking glance, "and I could not read a word if I tried."

"Why, Miss Myrick—"

"Now, I am not so very naughty—am I? Do hand me up that dusty old book, and then you may help me down."

"But, Miss Myrick, for half an hour you have led me to suppose that you wished to read—"

"Have you not learned what a frivolous creature I am? 'Shure, I was only tazin', as your countrywomen have it, Mr. Owen."

He looked a little bewildered as he stooped to get the book, and his youthful face took on another rosy glow at her reference to his Irish blood. His youth and blushes gave but slight index to the strength of purpose and character he possessed; and, alas! he was indeed as wax under the hands of this bewildering little damsel. She loved to call the color to his face and watch the play of emotion on his features.

"Confess," she said, as she slid the volume into place and glanced down at him, "you would like to know what brought me here if my motive was not mischief."

"If it is your pleasure, mam'zelle, I should be glad to know," he replied.

"I came because I knew papa had gone to South Walsingham and would not be here. I wanted to see you—alone."

At this audacious statement, Mr. Owen looked more amazed than before.

"Don't stare at me that way—it is not polite," she said, a little sharply. "Besides, your nose is not Grecian enough to make a good curve with your chin at that angle."

"I beg your pardon—I will not look at you. Though, how can I help it?" in a despairing tone.

"I made the book an excuse to test your mood. If you had been good-natured, I should have preferred a request; as it is, I shall not dare to do so."

"Miss Myrick, I am as serene as a summer day and devoured with curiosity," he replied, eagerly.

"No; I am completely cowed by the fire of your eye, just now, when I referred to your native land."

"Miss Myrick, if you do not make known your request at once, I positively refuse to help you down."

"As if that mattered in the least! Goodness, was that the office-door? Someone coming in here?"

"It is more than probable. I have been expecting Mrs. Loder from Avon all the afternoon. Your father is trying to get her a pension."

"Oh! let me down. Help me, quickly. She must not find me here; she is the greatest old gossip in the county."

"Will you tell me what you wished me to do?"

"That is not fair. She is coming—Laurence, please help me, or I shall fall."

He laughed right merrily.

"You are too late. Sit still; I will throw something over you, and, if you keep quiet, you are so high she will never see you."

He caught a cover from a side-table as he spoke, and threw it over her just as the door opened and the lady in question entered. She was a slight female, clad in black, with a countenance indicative of curiosity. She evidently felt a certain stir in the atmosphere of the room, and looked about a little suspiciously. But Mr. Owen was calmly at her service, mistaking Mr. Myrick's absence understood and explaining the details of her affairs very clearly. Mrs. Loder was rather dense in comprehending, and Laurence, moreover, was so polite and patient, that she became interested in him and prolonged her call. Finally she arose to depart, and Rue drew a long breath of relief; the visitor had not even glanced her way.

"I presume," said Mrs. Loder, "Mr. Myrick has gone to South Walsingham about that will of old Mr. Morris's. Seems as if men couldn't die nowadays without doing strange things by their own children." She spoke with a whine.

"Mr. Myrick is the executor of the Morris will, but I do not know why he went to South Walsingham."

"I heard that old Morris left every cent to his second wife, and his son Eric won't have a stiver."

"Ah!"

"Well, Providence's ways are queer and not accordin' to straight lines—more inclined to cross-cuts and biases," said she, piously. "But it does seem hard to cut off his own son, and leave a legacy to Mr. Myrick, his lawyer. Folks is talkin' of it at Avon, and the 'Brompton Courier' has an article of two pages on it. Did you see it?" scanning the youth's face closely.

"Eric Morris is a dear friend of mine. I cannot discuss his griefs quietly; yet I do not think he will strive to break the will," was the reply.

"They do say he is engaged to marry his step-sister, Kate Gifford."

"That is true."

"Well, it does beat the Jews, the way some folks manage. Lettin' girls engage themselves to whipper-snappers without a cent. But catch Lawyer Myrick lettin' his daughter throw herself away, if he has to fix it all up, like old man Myddleton did, over to Avon. I hear Miss Myrick is to be married to Captain Leland in June."

"I am sorry to hurry you, Mrs. Loder," said Laurence Owen, hastily, seeing a dangerous movement on the ladder, "but I am very much engaged just now—upon—"

"A—ca—chew!"

It was a clear resounding sneeze, and it came from the ladder, but little smothered by the folds of the table-cover. At the same moment, Rue Myrick threw aside the cloth and descended the steps. Mrs. Loder gave a great start.

"For lands' sake! Ruth Myrick, what do you mean by scaring folks so? How came you up there on that high-falutin' ladder?"

"I have been there all the time, Mrs. Loder," was the demure reply, enjoying the situation. "I heard all you said of papa and of me!"

"How did you come there?"

"I came to hunt a book of reference. We are studying the thought totality of the empirical finite in our literary class. Mr. Owen was directing me to a fruitful source of information on this subject."

"Ruth Myrick! I never should have supposed—and your grandmother a good Quaker. Well, this earth is aquiver with depravity. The idea of those heathen things you talk about, and sitting on ladders discoursing to young men. How does the captain like that?"

"Captain Leland has no control over my actions at present. To prove this to you, I do not mind telling you I am going to the concert to-night with Mr. Owen."

A light broke over Laurence's face. This was the request she was about to make, to ask him to share Mr. Myrick's seats at the concert that night. What was her motive? Dearly as he loved her, he felt she had some reason other than her pleasure in asking him. He did not glance at her; but, while pride whispered caution, hope was rampant in his heart.

"You be careful, Rue Myrick, or you will pick up a crooked stick at last," said Mrs. Loder. "Good-day, Mr. Owen; thank you for your kindness. You are as perfect a gentleman as I ever met, and some day I hope to see you with a good steady wife, and none of these fluttering, fizzling butterflies of girls. Good-day!"

And Mrs. Loder departed.

"I hope you will profit by her advice, Mr. Owen," said Rue.

"Thanks. But why did you perpetrate that unrighteous sneeze?"

"I was afraid she would say something dreadful about me. Besides, I wanted to frighten the old thing. Talking in that manner, as if papa expected to sell me to the highest bidder!"

"I confess I feared the old lady might annoy you by further comment, so I tried to hasten her. But tell me: why do you wish me to go with you to-night?"

"It was a favor I longed, yet feared to ask."

"You only feared because you thought I would question your motive in asking me. I can only consent, provided you tell me why I am chosen."

"Do you ask the wind whence it blows?"

"No, we know that acts according to natural laws."

"And I?"

"You are a law unto yourself, and often remind me of an evil wind that blows nobody good."

"Thanks! you are complimentary. Let me pass, please."

She made an effort to do so, but he placed himself in her way.

"I was rude—pardon me," he said. "I would be glad to go with you to-night, but I entreat you to tell me—"

"I can tell you nothing more than I have already told you. You are exacting, and refuse me my one request. Let me pass!"

At this moment, Rue's maid opened the library-door.

"Your father is home, Miss Myrick, and Miss Gifford is with him."

"Very well, Fanny. I will come."

As the servant disappeared, she turned to Laurence again.

"And you refuse me, Mr. Owen?"

"No, no! no matter how unfairly you win my consent, I would count the world well lost for your sake, willful lovely little woman that you are!"

His voice sank to a whisper, and he kissed passionately her dimpled hand. At the same

moment, the door opened and Mr. Myrick appeared on the threshold.

CHAPTER II.

MR. MYRICK kept his stand, a merry twinkle in his eye as he beheld Laurence's blushing confusion. But Rue went up to her father, raising her face for his kiss, and meeting his glance with one of equal amusement.

"What are you doing here, may I ask?" demanded Mr. Myrick. "Helping Laurence conjugate verbs, instead of following the delights of Blackstone?"

"I came in pursuit of knowledge, and then we were just rehearsing the scene of a little play we have in hand," explained Rue, demurely.

"Humph! 'An old way to pay new debts,' I suppose. But it may terminate in a 'School for Scandal.' I met Mrs. Loder just now, and she informed me Mr. Owen said he was very much engaged, and she presumed it was to my daughter, since Miss Myrick was in the library looking up total finances." Mr. Myrick spoke good-naturedly, but with covert sarcasm. His keen eye read Laurence's face like an open book.

"Oh! the miserable old creature!" cried Rue, and she forthwith related the adventure.

"Well, go to Kate now," said Mr. Myrick, after listening and laughing. "Poor girl, she is completely unstrung by her troubles. It is a sad thing to have mother and lover at variance. Run along, little sinner, and do not let me hear of your trespassing again," and he kissed her tenderly and held the door open. She flashed one bewildering glance upon Laurence, and departed.

Speeding down the hall, she entered a large reception-room, and embraced rapturously a young girl who stood awaiting her.

"Kate, dear Kate, how glad I am you came back with papa. I have so much to tell you, and—but I forgot!" and Rue paused, touching her friend's black dress, and growing suddenly grave.

"Oh, don't!" cried the other, with a shrug of disdain and distress. "I cannot help it—I do not feel any great grief. I wear it because I must, for mother's and Eric's sake. But I hate it. He was not my father."

"I know it, Kate dear; but, if you love Eric—"

"True, true, Ruth; but, when I think how, after apparently forgiving Eric what he chose to consider his past offenses, and after Eric's devotion up to the moment of his death, to

make a will bequeathing everything to my mother, and leaving Eric penniless—it was too hard. I was dependent enough on mamma's whims, and now I am utterly at her mercy, and Eric powerless to save me. You know what mamma is."

"Come, Kate dear, suppose we go to my room, where we can talk undisturbed. The black is very becoming to you, Kitty, if that consoles you any," and Rue glanced with admiration at the fair face, with the shining hair, rendered more striking by the sombre garb.

"You see, dear," Rue continued, as on reaching her dainty boudoir she gently removed Katharine's bonnet and wrap, "if your mother were not your mother, and one of nature's freaks besides; and Eric were not your step-brother as well as fiancé; if the late Mr. Morris had not been your mother's second husband, and a very irate tantalizing old gentleman, I might be able to talk of them to you more freely. As it is, I naturally feel a little delicacy—"

"Rue! you are as incorrigible as ever. You know I do not care a rap what you say about any of them."

"Not if I said Eric was a 'perverse young idiot to fall in love with you'?"

"You will please not quote the late Mr. Morris!" said Kate, smiling.

"Tell me all about it, Kitty," and Rue settled herself comfortably in order to listen.

"It was bad enough when Eric's father disinherited him. An only child—and having committed no offense worthy of such severe condemnation. I loved him then, poor boy! Three months before Mr. Morris's death, he recalled Eric, even forgave his engagement to me, and all seemed peace and serenity. But, when your father read the will, after the funeral, we found Mr. Morris had only added a codicil to the old will, in which he left my mother every cent he possessed, except a large legacy to your father. The codicil left Eric the picture of his mother that always hung in the east bed-chamber, Eric's old room, at 'Elland.' It makes mamma's fortune immense. A hundred and eighty-five thousand, besides all my own father left her. Your father's legacy, of course, did not amount to much, taken from such an estate."

"Papa did not tell me—" began Rue, then stopped, remembering Mrs. Loder's peculiar tone when mentioning this legacy.

"Of course, Eric feels very sore over it, but was endeavoring to make the best of it, when mamma referred, without any tact, to former trouble existing between Eric and his father. A rather unpleasant scene occurred, and I took

Eric's side. Mamma then said that, if I persisted in clinging to him in his poverty, I need expect no consent or aid from her in the matter. Consequently, although in the same house, we have not spoken for days."

"Delightful! I am glad I have no mother," said Rue.

"Oh! don't say that," cried Kate, tears filling her eyes; "all mothers are not like mine, nor did mine use to be like this. She loves me, but she hates Eric. Oh! Rue, sometimes I feel nearly heart-broken," and she hid her face and sobbed aloud.

"Kate dear, forgive me," cried Rue, remorsefully. "I always sympathize too much or too little."

"To crown it all, Eric goes abroad, to be absent a long time."

"No!"

"He had the position offered him before he knew of his father's illness. His late professorship has fitted him for filling a post on a Government expedition. He can carry on his newspaper work with it. It is a splendid thing for Eric."

"When does he leave?"

"In ten days. I wonder you have not heard about it, because Eric has been wild to have Larry Owen go with him, as there is a place under Eric still vacant."

"'Larry' Owen!" repeated Rue, with an odd little smile. "You must know him well."

"Oh, yes! he was Eric's most intimate friend at school and college. I used to meet him every summer, when we went to join Eric. Then he was several times at his aunts', the Misses Owen—but you happened always to be away. He is a dear boy—I wondered a little at his being in your father's office."

"Papa told me that, though a relative of the South Walsingham Owens, he was dependent on his own exertions; poor as a church mouse."

"Why, he is the nephew of the two old ladies—Miss Jean and her sister. He is the son of the brother who ran away with a governess before they came to America. His mother died when he was born, and I fancy his childhood was rather a checkered one. His aunts fairly worship him, however," Kate concluded.

"Do you think they adore him to the extent of leaving him their fortune?" Rue asked.

"I had a confused remembrance, from something Eric told me, that Larry was really Arthur Owen's heir," rejoined Kate.

"Nonsense!" cried Rue, with decision. "Papa said that was only a foolish report. The old ladies may love him, but they never forget

his mother's blood. The Owens are very proud. By the way, Kate, I must leave you this evening. I am engaged to go to a concert with Mr. Owen. You will not think me rude?"

"I would not interfere for the world. Besides, Eric is coming, and for the first time in a week we will have an undisturbed conversation. It was good of your father to ask me to visit you now, because he knew Eric would be in Brompton until his departure."

"Papa is a brick," said Rue, cheerfully.

"Rue!" Kate spoke, after a silence during which her hostess had been adjusting a miniature piece of court-plaster near the dimple in her chin. She started at the abrupt sound of her name, crying:

"Oh! Kate, you made me jump, and I have got it all on one side. Why will you startle one in that fashion?"

"Rue, I hope you are not flirting with Laurence Owen," Kate went on, regardless of the expostulation.

"No, I am not. He is flirting with me. 'My heart's most broke wid him,' as Biddy used to say."

"Because," continued Kate, "he is as innocent as a lamb about women. Eric fancied he was a little altered when he last saw him, and I have heard your names coupled very often of late."

"He is an unsophisticated babe," said Rue, pensively. "Kate, I have three varieties in admirers at present. Captain Leland—all boldness and dash; Oliver Murray, sedate and middle-aged; and Laurence Owen, young, foolish, and enthusiastic."

"And you, Rue—you care for—"

"I do not care for any one of the trio. They are amusing; still, they bore me at times! I could have any one of them, and I will have none."

"Naughty Rue! Eric says you overestimate your power."

"When did Eric Morris say that?" demanded Rue, frowning.

"He was speaking of Larry's case. I said you were a sad flirt, and he laughed and said you always overestimated your power of captivating."

"Did you believe him, Kate?" she asked, quickly.

"Ah, you little fury! The truth is out; you do care for Larry, then?"

"Not I," Rue spoke, almost harshly. Then, assuming a rich Irish brogue, she added: "Och, it's meself that would have a foin name—Mrs. Larry Owen. Do you think I want the loikes of that?"

Kate laughed in spite of herself.

"Wait until you are asked," she said, recovering her gravity.

"No, I won't," rejoined Rue, coolly. "I will prove to you this 'night that Laurence Owen loves me. I will wager you a box of French candy against anything you and Eric will offer, that, before I retire to-night, Laurence will ask me to be his wife."

"Nonsense, Rue. He has nothing to marry on, and he is not a fool."

"Nevertheless, I will win my wager. Do you accept the terms?"

"You are not in earnest," Kate exclaimed, in a puzzled tone.

"I look on Eric's speech as a challenge! I am very much in earnest, I assure you!"

"Rue, it would be wicked!" pleaded Kate.

"Gloves against candy—I need a new pair!"

"Gloves, then; but I know you will lose."

"Thank you! And now, it is almost dinner-time. Shall we go down?"

CHAPTER III.

EVEN from the little the reader has seen of Miss Ruth Myrick, it will not be hard to understand that she was willfully in earnest regarding her wager. Never having known a mother's care, she had lived a "law unto herself" for the nineteen years of her life. Her father, a shrewd lawyer, idolized his pretty daughter, and, as she grew in grace and beauty, flattered himself she also had the same imperturbable heart as his own. He was a man who reached for what he wanted, and, if his hand failed to attain it in one way, he did not hesitate to compass his end in a more adroit manner.

He had the reputation of being a scrupulously honest lawyer, however, and was said to be very wealthy, albeit there had been ugly rumors at one time of heavy speculations terminating in losses. This legacy from the Morris estate would prove a windfall certainly, sweeping away some of the difficulties that had recently beset him.

He was proud of Ruth's conquests, and felt not a whit of sympathy for the rejected suitors; least of all did he regard Laurence Owen: he was so young and penniless as to be out of the question. Mr. Myrick did not take into consideration the fact that, under her worldly exterior, Ruth had a truthful heart, inherited from that sweet mother who had left friends and luxury to join her life to that of the then struggling briefless lawyer.

Kate was not long in imparting to Eric Morris Rue's venturesome wager. Rue was dressing

for the concert when Eric arrived; and, after the first rapturous greeting and joy in thus being free to meet alone had passed, Kate laughingly told him. Eric was very indignant, however.

"I thought Rue had more good-sense than to suggest such a thing. I shall warn Larry."

"No, you must not say anything, or you will betray me. Rue is more remorseless than ever, I think."

"Do you know, Kitty, that Miss Jean owned to me, last week, that it is Laurence for whom they hold the Owen estate in trust? He is as yet in ignorance of his large fortune, but his education has been such as to fit him for the position. Miss Jean and her sister have annuities, and, on Larry's coming of age, he will assume control of the property."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes. But not a whisper of this yet: she told me in confidence. But Laurence will probably know it now, before a great while; for they want him to go abroad with me."

"Strange! Rue was talking of Larry to-day, and she said he was poor as a church mouse."

"Well, perhaps she was not named 'Rue' in vain," returned Eric. "Larry is so true and so earnest, I cannot bear to have him suffer. He will fall into her trap, I know. poor lad. I am very fond of him."

"You are not willing he should buy his experience. You are very soft-hearted."

"Treason, Kate! Yet I am glad you did not say 'soft-headed.' And now, sweetheart, do you realize that I must leave you for a long while, in just ten days?"

"Eric, I cannot bear to think of it—it breaks my heart."

And then their conversation became so personal, that it would hardly be fair to place it on record.

Rue came into the room, after carefully lingering in the hall and giving a long low whistle of warning.

"Ah, you rogue!" said Eric, as she came in, smiling mischievously.

She was clad in rich velvet and handsome furs, and she looked more distractingly lovely than ever.

"Was I considerate in my approach?" she asked. "It was not just good-breeding to whistle, but I thought you would be grateful. Besides, since the fashion of portières, the conventional rattle of the door-knob is a thing of the past. How well you are looking, Eric."

"Thank you. I may return the compliment. But I hear you are still seeking new fields of conquest."

"No," she said, demurely; "I overestimate my power. I am in despair, ready to say with Rosalind: 'Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.'"

Eric laughed, while Kate looked a little shocked.

"Kate has told you of our wager?" she asked.

"Yes. And Rue, if you will permit me—"

"But I will not. And here is Mr. Owen."

True enough, Laurence Owen had just been admitted; and, making a mocking bow to Eric and smiling at Kate, Rue departed with him.

It was an evening of rare pleasure for young Owen. He had already lost his heart. To-night, he bade fair to lose his head also, he was in a delirium of such hope and delight. The music-hall was crowded. Across the intervening seats, Rue felt the glare of Captain Leland's glance, and knew she had attained her purpose in further enraging his jealous heart. It added new zest to the game she was playing and brought a more brilliant light to her beautiful eyes.

On their return to the house, Laurence accepted her invitation to enter, and followed her as one in a dream.

Eric had made his adieu at the traditionally proper hour of ten. The reception-room was deserted. Rue led the way to a cozy apartment beyond, where the fire burned low on the hearth and a soft light from rose-tinted shades shone on a table spread with a dainty tête-à-tête set. Rue tossed aside her wraps and touched a small bell.

"You will have a cup of chocolate with me, Mr. Owen?" she said. "Papa usually awaits my return, and we have it together. I think we must be late, since he and Kate have both retired."

"So late, I think I had best depart," said Laurence, reluctantly.

"No, you must stay. I cannot drink my chocolate alone."

At this moment, the maid entered, bringing the chocolate. Laurence drank his as if it had been ambrosia, because Rue's white fingers dropped the sugar in the cup, as she smiled at him.

"I am actually contemplating going abroad

with Eric, Miss Myrick," said he, finally, as he put his cup down.

"You are?" returned Rue, rather absently, remembering her wager.

"I think it would be of untold value to me to see more of the world. Only one hates to leave friends and home for so long."

"We should miss you," she said, softly, glancing at him, then letting her long lashes veil her eyes, while her white teeth caught her lip in momentary embarrassment. The picture was perfect in its way, and none of the effect was lost on the impassioned youth.

He drew nearer, as he said:

"Miss Myrick, make the regret personal—will you not?"

"You wish me to say 'I will miss you'?" she asked. "Yes, it is true: I should miss you very much."

"Thank you," he responded, fervently; "those words mean a great deal to me. Will you consent to say something still more gratifying?"

His voice trembled.

Rue clasped her little white hands over each other, raised her great eyes a moment, and looked at him. The glance spoke volumes more than was in her heart. Alas! that the windows of the soul should serve as a loophole through which are forced our false desires!

"I will try to please you," she murmured, gently.

"Tell me you wish me to stay," he said, earnestly. "For weeks and months, you have been the ideal of all that, to me, is good and beautiful. I see in you the pure soul that aspires to higher things. Oh, Rue, be true to that better self; your words have weight to make or mar my future."

"Mr. Owen—Laurence—I beg—" began Rue, impetuously; for she felt a sudden shame at the part she was acting.

"No, Rue—you must hear me now: In your keeping lies the happiness or misery of my life. Young as I am, your love will give me strength and courage to win fortune and position, for your dear sake. Rue, I love you—the purest holiest feelings of my heart are all yours."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

FAITH.

As the rainbow that brightens the west
Gives pledge of a beautiful morrow,

So the faith that His loved ones find rest
Casts light o'er the heaviest sorrow.

A STORY WITHOUT A PLOT.

BY ANNA MORRIS.

POOR Kate West! How could she grind a story out of her weary brain that night, when she had already written steadily for many hours? And yet she must try, for writing meant bread and butter to her. She knew too well how difficult it is for a comparatively unknown author to find a sale for his productions, to venture to refuse any opportunity, even though it were not a very profitable one.

Languidly she re-read the open note which she had just received. It was from the publisher of a weekly paper, who occasionally employed her to write sketches on any subject which happened to strike his fancy, and who, from the short time which he allowed her, apparently supposed that she kept ready-written articles, on every imaginable topic, constantly on hand. His present demand was as follows:

"DEAR MISS WEST:

"Please send me by the early post, to-morrow, a short sketch of two or three columns. You can choose your own subject, only let it be something bright and interesting—suitable for warm-weather reading. Respectfully,

"G. N. SOTHERN."

"Choose my own subject! How very definite!" muttered Kate, sarcastically, as she tossed the note aside. "The earliest post! Then it must be done to-night! And I haven't an idea, nor the ghost of one! I have worked all day on the translation of this French book, because I hadn't energy enough to think of a plot; and now, when I am tired out, I must try to concoct a story!"

"Let me see what time it is," she continued, rising and going to the window, which looked out on a church clock. "Half-past six! Well, I will bathe my face, brush my hair, and take a walk, and perhaps, by the time I come back, I may have something to write about." So saying, she commenced her simple toilet, and was soon ready to go out.

But a walk through crowded city streets is not especially conducive to rest, and Kate returned little brighter than when she started. Sinking into a chair by the open window, she dreamily watched the passers-by or noticed listlessly how one after another of the dark houses looming up on the opposite side of the street would shine out suddenly as the gas was

lighted in their various rooms. Gradually she grew interested in watching the house directly in front. A little wistful face had long been pressed close to one of the parlor windows, which was closed, notwithstanding the heat. Kate had noticed the child, and wondered what made her look so sad and lonely. Now, in the dusk, the little creature still stood watching. At last she left the window, and in a moment appeared on the steps, looking eagerly up and down the street.

After a few minutes, however, she went in, and, as she left the parlor-door open, Kate could see her movements by the light which shone from the hall. Going to the mantel, she took something from it, then, by the aid of a chair, she climbed to the centre-table. In a second, she had struck a match, and, standing on tiptoe, was endeavoring to light one of the burners of the chandelier above her head. This she succeeded in doing; but, unfortunately, as she stepped back into the chair, it tipped over, and the child fell backward to the floor. Breathlessly Kate leaned from the window to see if anyone in the house had heard the fall, and would come to the little one's assistance; but, after waiting a few moments, and finding that no one appeared, she sprang from her seat, rushed downstairs, across the street, and up the steps of the house she had been watching. Fortunately the child had not fastened the door when she re-entered the hall, and it yielded readily to Kate's impatient hand. In another instant, she was bending over the senseless form on the floor. The child had been stunned by her fall, and, as Kate lifted her and laid her on a sofa, she was struck, not only by her beauty, but by a strangely familiar look in the features, though she could not recall whom they so strongly resembled.

Kate saw a glass of water standing on a small table. Some of this she sprinkled on the child's face, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the large blue eyes unclose, and a little hand stole up to her face with a sweet caressing motion. But the next moment it was withdrawn, and the child burst into a violent fit of sobbing.

"What is it, dear?" asked Kate, bending over her. "Have you hurt yourself? Does your head ache?"

"No," sobbed the child, "it isn't my head; but I thought, when I woke up, that you were my own dear mamma come back, and that I shouldn't be lonely any more."

"Where is your mamma?" asked Kate. "And what made her leave you here by yourself?"

"Hush!" said the little girl, in a whisper. "Don't speak so about my mamma: she is in heaven, and can't come back, or I know she would when her little Nellie wants her so."

Tears dropped on the golden curls that Kate was tenderly stroking, and, presently, she inquired softly:

"But who takes care of you, Nellie dear? Surely, you don't live here all alone."

"Oh, no," answered the child, smiling. "My papa lives here, only he has to be gone all day and leave me with Maggie. Maggie is the cook, you know, and she is kind to me. But, to-day, she heard that her brother was ill, and she cried so hard; and, by-and-by, she asked me if I should be afraid to stay alone while she ran home to see him, and I thought I shouldn't. So she left me some cakes and a glass of water and lighted the hall-gas, for she said it might grow dark before she came. I played with my doll a good while, and then I watched for papa ever so long; and then I thought he wouldn't like the house so dark, and I tried to light the gas, and I suppose I fell down and went to sleep. But what made you come?" she continued, presently, as if the fact that Kate was a stranger had just entered her head.

"I saw you fall, Nellie," Kate replied. "I live just across the street, and was sitting at the window, and, when you fell and no one came to help you, I ran over."

"That was very kind," said the little girl. "Papa will come home presently, and he will thank you for taking care of me."

"I ought to go back," began Kate, doubtfully, as a thought of her unwritten story crossed her mind; "but I cannot leave you alone. I'll wait until Maggie comes."

"And papa too!" pleaded the child. "Papa will be very glad to see you again, I know—because he is so fond of you."

"So fond of me?" echoed Kate, in surprise, and secretly wondering if Nellie's fall had affected her brain. "Your papa does not know me."

"Oh, yes, he does," answered Nellie, confidently. "I know he does: because, one day, I went to his room to call him to dinner, and he was looking at a picture, and, just as I went

in, he kissed it and said: 'Darling Kate! Shall I never see you again?' And then I spoke, and, as he turned round, he dropped the picture. I picked it up, and it was a picture of you."

Kate heard as if in a dream. The child's innocent words had brought back the romance of her life. She knew now of whose face Nellie's had reminded her, and memories that she had thought trampled down and buried forever came rushing back in wild confusion. Once more, she was the promised bride of Edward Farrington, and listened to his vows of love and devotion. Once more, something—what, she had never known—suddenly drove him from her; and, since that hour, she had never heard of him, although she had seen a notice of his marriage in the newspapers.

So completely absorbed was she in these thoughts, that Nellie's gentle touch failed to rouse her.

But a few moments had passed, however, when a quick manly tread was heard on the steps and in the hall; and, springing from the sofa, Nellie flew across the room, exclaiming:

"Oh, papa, come here and see the lady whose picture you have upstairs!"

Mr. Farrington caught sight of the visitor, and hurried forward with a cry of joy.

Maggie returned before Kate half understood how another lover had made the mischief between her and Mr. Farrington, hoping in this way to gain her himself, or how Edward had married, out of pity, a poor friendless orphan, who had been dead two years.

So much was to be told, that they knew not where to begin, and Kate was almost glad to escape to the quiet of her own room and have leisure to think over the strange events of the past hours. Her heart thrilled still with her lover's words, as he left her at the door:

"Remember, it will be your last lonely evening. We have waited too long already. To-morrow must make you my wife and give my little Nellie a mother."

As Kate entered her chamber, her eyes fell on the note from Mr. Sothern. Could she write this evening? She could no longer complain of a lack of ideas, but to arrange them in anything like order seemed impossible. Still, it would quiet her even to sit and hold her pen as usual; and, dropping into her chair, she began writing—with no plan, no plot, simply the outpouring of her happiness.

Yet never had Mr. Sothern expressed such approbation; never before had she so compelled readers to appreciate her as by her **STORY WITHOUT A PLOT.**